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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 000692

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS  
LONDON FOR POL - GURNEY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [NP](#) [GON](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: GOVERNMENT NAMES MEMBERS OF NEGOTIATING  
TEAM

REF: A. (A) KATHMANDU 0656

[B.](#) (B) KATHMANDU 0468

Classified By: DCM ROBERT K. BOGGS. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

[1.](#) (SBU) On April 16 the Government of Nepal (GON) announced the members of the team it appointed to negotiate with Maoist insurgents. As expected, the appointees are all members of the Cabinet. The six-person team, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Badri Prasad Mandal, includes: Physical Works Minister Narayan Singh Pun, GON-appointed coordinator for the talks; Information Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey; Labor Minister Kamal Prasad Chaulagain; Health Minister Upendra Devkota; and Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare Anuradha Koirala. No date for the beginning of proposed peace talks with the Maoists has yet been set.

[2.](#) (C) Comment: The composition of the team offers an interesting mix of backgrounds. Deputy PM Mandal and Information Minister Pandey were former ministers in the partyless Panchayat regime. A former member of the National Assembly, Pandey has close links to the Palace. Like Maoist negotiator Matrika Yadav, Mandal comes from the southern Terai plains along the border with India. Labor Minister Chaulagain (a former member of the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist) and Health Minister Devkota, on the other hand, are generally perceived as the "leftists" in the Cabinet. (Devkota also knows Baburam Bhattarai, the Maoists' lead negotiator, from their school days together in Gorkha, where Bhattarai habitually topped the class and Devkota ranked second.) Physical Works Minister Pun, who has been the GON's point man for dealing with the Maoists since the declaration of the ceasefire on January 29, is a former Army Colonel and, like Maoist negotiator and military strategist Ram Bahadur Thapa, a member of the Magar ethnic group. Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare Anuradha Koirala, the only woman in the Cabinet, was most likely chosen in order to represent the concerns of women. (The Maoists, who laud equal rights for women in their rhetoric, have been criticized in some quarters for not having included a woman on their five-man negotiating team.)

[3.](#) (C) Comment continued: Maoist complaints that the GON was stalling by not announcing the members of its team had grown increasingly strident over the past few weeks, with the insurgents citing the delay as "evidence" that the GON is not serious about dialogue (Ref A). The GON's move is likely an effort to defuse such criticism. At the same time, a spate of rumors--reportedly fueled by intra-Cabinet rivalries--over the past week had been hinting that Minister Pun would be replaced as lead negotiator for the GON. Chief among Pun's detractors, apparently, were Mandal and Pandey. The appointment of panchayati apologist Mandal, who outstrips Pun in Cabinet rank, if not in negotiating skill or intellect, may have been intended to mitigate these jealousies. Whether these rivalries will undermine the performance or cohesiveness of the GON team remains to be seen. Leaders of the main parliamentary parties can be expected to complain at their exclusion from the team (Nepali Congress President G.P. Koirala is said to be already urging the Maoists not to negotiate with the interim government). The parties themselves, however, all but ensured their own exclusion through their consistent refusal to cooperate with the GON (Ref B).

MALINOWSKI